

Report Exposes TNPCB Fraud to Exonerate SIPCOT Cuddalore

Chennai, 29 April 2011:

The Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) has fraudulently calculated the pollution index of SIPCOT Cuddalore to lift the moratorium on new industries imposed by the Ministry of Environment and Forests in January 2010, according to a report titled "A Critique of the TNPCB/CPCB Action Plan for Cuddalore" by SIPCOT Area Community Environmental Monitors and The Other Media." The report established that TNPCB and CPCB have cooked up data to keep pollution index figures artificially low and help SIPCOT Cuddalore move from being classified as "critically polluted." The report charges the CPCB and TNPCB of preparing the action plan based on lies, half-truths and omissions.

As per CPCB's original Comprehensive Environmental Pollution Index study of January 2010, Cuddalore was classified as critically polluted because its pollution index score exceeded 70 percent. The new figure of 54.5 was arrived at unscientifically through fraudulent means, and does not reveal the true state of environment in SIPCOT Cuddalore, SACEM charged. The Community group which furnished its own data to establish that pollution continues unabated in SIPCOT said the TNPCB has ignored its own data while calculating the index scores. "Had the TNPCB considered its own data, including those that establish the presence of carcinogens in air, water and land, the CEPI score would have been around 80, even higher than what was assigned to the region in January 2010," the report's authors said.

The organisations said their report provides the basis for re-imposing the moratorium on industrial expansion in the SIPCOT region, and highlights the collusive and unscientific functioning of the state and central regulatory agencies.

TNPCB's calculations come almost 11 months after the first CEPI study released by Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) declared Cuddalore 16th most polluted in the country with a score of 77.5. After the release of the first scores in January 2010, the MoEF had imposed a temporary moratorium on setting up of new industries and expansion of existing units until the environment was remediated and pollution brought under control. Based on the latest scores of TNPCB, the MoEF lifted the moratorium on 15 February 2011.

SACEM report indicates that the Board has not only ignored its own data it also did not take into cognizance community complaints of environmental violations from SIPCOT units. SACEM reveals that in the period between January and November 2010, at least 130 violations from the SIPCOT were reported to the Board. They included illegal discharge of effluent on land, canals, river, gas leaks, illegal expansions of units, dumping of hazardous wastes, fish kills, industrial accidents and injury to residents and workers. "None of these have been mentioned in the report. On the contrary in many places the report claims that there were no violations reported from the region," said SACEM. "The real state of Cuddalore's environment can be assessed from the fact that barely two weeks after the moratorium was lifted from SIPCOT based on the predicted scores of TNPCB there was a major gas leak from Shasun Chemicals that injured more than 300 residents. The unit was storing chemicals and operating without a valid consent," added SACEM.

The TNPCB's Action Plan also fails to mention that 20 out of 31 units in SIPCOT area are illegal and do not have valid Consent to Operate even though violations of Air and Water Acts are prosecutable offences under Air and Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Acts.

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Background of CEPI study:

Released in January 2010, first of its kind, the CEPI study aimed to assess and rank the environmental pollution in 88 industrial clusters across the country. Based on the extent of water, land and air pollution in these hubs the study formulated a CEPI. It took into account available data on land, water and air pollution, biodiversity, ecological damage and waste management to make this assessment. The clusters were ranked on a scale of 0-100, where a high score indicates high levels of pollution and environmental degradation. Ten out of 88 of these clusters scored above 80 indicating extremely high levels of air, water and land pollution in these regions. Thirty-three clusters have scored between 70 and 80 and are classified as "critically" polluted while at least 32 others scored between 60 and 70 and are considered as "seriously" polluted clusters. Clusters that scored between 50-60 are classified as in the "warning" zones. The top polluters from Tamil Nadu included Vellore, Cuddalore, Manali, Coimbatore, Tirupur, Mettur and Erode. While Vellore ranked 8th in the list of most polluted among the 88 hubs, Cuddalore was ranked 16th, Manali 20th, Coimbatore 34th, Tirupur 51st, Mettur 56th and Erode 78th. The MoEF imposed a moratorium on new units or expansion of existing units in all critically polluted areas including Vellore, Cuddalore, Manali and Coimbatore from Tamilnadu in January 2010. Based on subsequent submissions of action plans by the TNPCB the moratorium has been lifted from Cuddalore and Coimbatore.

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